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Christus Crucifer

By C. R. MOREY

THIS paper is an experiment in Early Christian Iconography. It is also meant to acquaint the members of the College Art Association with an instrument of research which it is hoped will be freely used by students of the history of art throughout the country, viz., the Index of Christian Art now in course of compilation at Princeton.

The Index, when complete, will cover the history of Christian Art to 1400. It is primarily iconographic, containing a card noting each occurrence of a subject or *motif*, with a reference to the best or most accessible illustration of the monument on which the subject or the *motif* occurs. But it will also include a list of the monuments, and on the cards of this list it is proposed to enter the principal bibliography of the monument, and to record on the iconographic cards as well the references for the iconographic study of particular subjects in both books and periodicals.

The Index is nearing completion for the Early Christian period. Most of the work on this first portion was done by Miss Alison Smith, and the existence itself of the Index is due to her unselfish and untiring devotion to the project over a period of two years. Miss Smith was obliged to discontinue her connection with the work this year, and it is now being carried on by members of the department of Art and Archaeology, supported in the matter of supplies and equipment by the Princeton University Library. We hope in the course of the current year to finish the Early Christian portion, and to complete the collection of photostats reproducing each monument catalogued. In the future additional funds must be secured to put the Index on a permanent basis by the employment of a cataloguer. Such funds are available for next year through the generous support of the Fogg



FIG. 2—OXFORD, BODLEIAN LIBRARY: IVORY BOOK COVER

Art Museum at Harvard University and of the Princeton Library.

The value of such an instrument of research is so obvious that I need not enlarge upon the various problems for which it offers solution. It will be more interesting to the reader if I select one such problem in Early Christian Art, and show what light is thrown upon it merely by the quasi-complete collection and classification of examples which the Index even in its present state affords.

The problem I have selected is: where did the type of Christ bearing or holding a Cross originate?¹ Is it Eastern or Western? Did the notion emanate from one center, or from more than one, being conceived simultaneously in several places? If the latter is true, can we differentiate the variants in the several localities, and so establish criteria for attributing works of art to this or that Early Christian center, such as Asia Minor, Italy, or Egypt?

The Index returns a very decisive answer as regards the Latin West. Of the fifty or so examples of the type listed in the Early Christian period, none occur among the frescoes of the catacombs of Rome and Naples. We find the first Western use of the type on Christian sarcophagi, where it appears eight times. But here an interesting development is noticed, which shows that the type as it appears on the sarcophagi is an imported one, and not native to the West. For the *Christus crucifer* is found only on sarcophagi adorned with columnar niches or obvious imitations thereof, and Mr. Stohlman of Princeton, who with the help of the Index has been investigating the iconography of these columnar sarcophagi,² finds that the scenes and types which they display constitute a more or less closed cycle distinct from that of the rest of the sarcophagi of the West. This cycle finds its parallels and continuation in the iconography of Asia Minor and the Byzantine art which issued from

1. This study does not of course include the type of Christ bearing the Cross in the *Via Crucis*. The illustrations of the article are used with the courteous permission of Dr. E. Baldwin Smith and are taken from his *Early Christian Iconography* (Princeton, University Press, 1918).

2. See *Amer. Jour. Arch.* 1922 (Jan.-March), p. 86.

that region, whence he concludes that the columnar sarcophagi were in part imported from that region, and in part were imitated from Asiatic models, so that the iconographic types found upon them must be of Asiatic origin. This Eastern influence is traceable chiefly in Gaul, in North Italy, and in the sarcophagi used by the rich Christians of Rome who had themselves buried around the tomb of St. Peter in the old cemetery of the Vatican. And it is in these localities that we find our eight examples of the *Christus crucifer*—on five sarcophagi of Gaul, one in Milan, and two from the Vatican cemetery.

These sarcophagi date in the fourth century. Later on, we find Christ holding a Cross in the mosaics of Italy, as in the famous Good Shepherd scene of the tomb of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, of the fifth century; in a chapel of the Archbishop's Palace at Ravenna of the same date, where the Saviour is strangely dressed as a warrior; and in S. Michele in Affricisco, whose mosaic of the sixth century, once in Ravenna, is now in the Berlin Museum. But Ravenna, in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, is an emporium of Eastern trade, receptive and not creative, save as she mingled the ideas of East and West into a new eclectic art. The peculiarities of Eastern iconography meet the eye constantly in works of Ravenna, side by side with *motifs* that are unmistakably Western.

At Rome the *Christus crucifer* appears in mosaics only at the end of the sixth century in S. Lorenzo *fuori le mura*, and at the beginning of the seventh in S. Teodoro. Both examples belong to the period of Roman art when it was swamped in Eastern influence, when the popes were Easterners, and the Roman state was a dependency of the Byzantine empire.

The *Christus crucifer* of the West is therefore no Latin invention, but came from the East, and, presumably, from the evidence afforded by the sarcophagi, from Asia Minor. The sarcophagi and the mosaics have this in common in their handling of the type, that the Saviour who holds the Cross is always represented in some symbolic scene, seated or standing between Peter and Paul, or some other pair of saints, or impersonating the Good Shepherd as in the tomb of Galla Placidia. The Cross,

too, is long, usually resting on the ground and merely grasped, not carried, by the Saviour. In no case is it employed as a wand or sceptre as we shall see was the case in another class of monuments.

We must therefore search among the works of East Christian art for further light on the *Christus crucifer*. If the early frescoes and mosaics that once decorated the churches of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Asia Minor were still extant, our problem would be a simple one, and we should find at once, by comparison with Western works, just what the West borrowed in developing its sacred art. But the East Christian art *in situ* is almost all gone. Save for the descriptions of mosaics and frescoes in Syria and Palestine left us by church writers, and what the excavations of Egyptian monasteries can tell us, our notions of the primitive Christian iconography of the East must be reconstructed from the minor arts. These small objects—lamps, illustrated books, medallions, ivories—are great travellers, and one can seldom tell, from the place where one of them happens to be found, the locality that produced it. Here, in the field of the minor arts, is the usefulness of iconography and of the Index most signally demonstrated, for, while the Early Christian *style* of this or that locality is not always sufficiently distinct to prove the provenance, the iconography of the object may often contain peculiarities which show in what country it was made. It is the business of the student of iconography, therefore, to isolate if he can the scenes and types which differ in form from one country to another, and thus to provide a means of classifying and locating this mass of otherwise unassigned material comprised in the Early Christian ivories, metal-work, manuscripts, and terracottas.

I think that the *Christus crucifer* is such a type. We have seen that it is the product of the Eastern, not the Western, church. But in the East it does not always keep the same form, and the abstract Christ grasping the long Cross which we have found to be in all probability an Asiatic invention undergoes variation in other centers of the Orient. One such variant was identified by E. Baldwin Smith in his book on Early Christian iconography. It is the type depicting Christ standing on the

lion or the dragon, or on a serpent, or on all four beasts of Scripture—lion, dragon, basilisk, and adder (Fig. 1). He always holds a cross, whose foot is usually on the head of one of the beasts. He is also short-haired, without the long curls falling upon the neck which distinguish the Asiatic Christ of the sarcophagi, or the beard which Syria gave to the Saviour, and which He wears in the Orientalized mosaics of Rome. Smith's type has been noted upon fifteen lamps of terracotta, nine of them from Africa. It finds its way to Ravenna, that reservoir of Eastern *motifs*, where it is seen in one of the stucco reliefs of the Orthodox Baptistery, and apparently also in a little composition which decorates a doorway of the palace of King Theoderic, as it is represented in mosaic on the walls of S. Apollinare Nuovo. It penetrates to Gaul, where we find it on a vase excavated at Orléans; it turns up finally in Carolingian art on an ivory plaque of the late eighth century of the Bodleian, in a very lively rendering (Fig. 2), and in more sedate form on a diptych from Genoels-Elderen, now in the Musée du Cinquantenaire at Brussels.

This type, as was pointed out above, first occurs on lamps of the fourth and fifth centuries, found for the most part in Africa. It is found on the cover of an earthenware vessel in the Cairo Museum, and appears also perhaps on a textile discovered at Achmim in Egypt. Such evidence points to Africa as the place where it was invented, and the close relation of the type to the Egyptian conception of Horus trampling on the crocodiles,³ together with the existence of two examples from Egypt, convinced Smith that this variant of the *Christus crucifer* originated there.

There is, however, another variant of our type that may with equal probability be attributed to Egypt. This is found on a certain class of ivories, whose chief representatives are the plaques decorating the famous bishop's throne at Ravenna which is known as the Cathedra of Maximianus. The center to which these ivories should be assigned has long been a matter of controversy: Diehl⁴

3. Smith, *Early Christian Iconography*, p. 148.

4. *Manuel d'art byzantin*, p. 281.

would have them products of Alexandria; Strzygowski⁵ thinks they were made in Antioch. Smith has summarized the evidence for Alexandria so far as the Cathedra of Maximianus is concerned,⁶ and in my opinion has made out a convincing case. Strzygowski, questioned on the point during his recent visit to this country, said that he was surer than ever that the Cathedra was Syrian. The evidence furnished by the Index makes it difficult to see how he can be right.

In the first place, some of the ivory boxes which belong by style to this group have upon them representations referring to Saint Menas, a thoroughly Egyptian saint, whose tomb near Alexandria was a famous pilgrimage center for the Coptic church. The tomb contained a statue of the saint standing between his characteristic camels, and this is quite faithfully reproduced by the ivory carvers on their boxes. Again, the panels of the Cathedra of Maximianus contain a representation of the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (Fig. 3) wherein the ass steps upon a rug instead of the usual mantle. Outside of this class of ivories there is only one example of such a rendering of the scene, namely a carved wooden lintel in the church of El-Muallaka near Cairo (Fig. 4). There are divers other indications which point to Egypt as the place of origin of the group, including the fact that one or two of them have actually been found in Egypt, and that these are the only ones whose ultimate provenance is known. The reader may find a mass of additional evidence in the article by Smith mentioned above.

Now, in almost all these ivories, Christ carries the Cross, not, as in the Asiatic type of the sarcophagi, as a detail of a symbolic complex, but in scenes of His life, as in the Entry into Jerusalem which we have just observed, and particularly in His miracles (Fig. 5). When He carries the Cross, He is beardless, not bearded as in Syria, and His hair is curly and short, instead of falling in long tresses upon His neck as in the works of Asia Minor. These two details constitute in my opinion a characteristic Egyptian, or Coptic, type of Christ, and afford a

5. *Jour. Hell. Studies*, 1907, p. 115.

6. *Am. Jour. Arch.* 1917, p. 22.



FIG. 1—BERGAMO. FORRER COLLECTION: CHRIST TRIUMPHANT, FROM A CHRISTIAN LAMP FROM ACHMIM



FIG. 5—PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE: HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC, FROM AN IVORY BOOK COVER



FIG. 3—RAVENNA, CATHEDRAL: THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM, FROM THE IVORY THRONE OF MAXIMIANUS



FIG. 4—CAIRO, CHURCH OF EL-MUALLAKA: WOODEN LINTEL

criterion for identifying works of the minor arts executed in Egypt, or under Coptic influence. The Cross in these Egyptian examples tends to get smaller, and to be used more and more as a sceptre or "wand of power," like the rod carried by the Saviour on the sarcophagi in performing His miracles (Fig 6). We find it actually thus used in a curious little Miracle of Cana on a gold medallion of the Antiquarium at Berlin (Fig. 7), where the Saviour pokes at the jars in which the water is turning into wine with a short-handled Cross, exactly as if He were wielding the wand of a magician. This medallion, it is to be noted, came from Egypt.

A short-haired Christ, carrying a Cross in the manner of a sceptre or a wand, is thus a proof of Egyptian origin. Its occurrence on a stamped vase-fragment from Syracuse, and on a bronze medallion in the Vatican, would show that these works were made in Egypt. It does not occur on any example of proven Asiatic origin so far known. There is, to be sure, a miniature in the Gospels of Etschmiadzin of Armenia, which depicts the short-haired Saviour enthroned between Peter and Paul, and holding a sceptre-cross in His hand. The manuscript itself is a Syrian writing of the tenth century, but the series of miniatures to which this one belongs are inserted in the codex, and Strzygowski believes them to be Syrian works of the sixth century. He does not sufficiently emphasize, however, the fact that these miniatures divide as to style into two classes, one of which is of recognizable Syrian style and iconography, while the other is of a style that can only be paralleled in Coptic work so far as the figures are concerned; one may compare the figures of Peter and Paul in the miniature above-mentioned with the saints painted on the walls of the Coptic monasteries at Sakkara and Bawit. Another of the miniatures done in this Coptic manner contains a Sacrifice of Isaac which Miss Alison Smith has proved (in the last issue of the *American Journal of Archaeology*) to be an example of the customary Egyptian type of that subject. Our *Christus crucifer* belongs to this Coptic division of the Etschmiadzin miniatures, and I am inclined to think that this minia-

ture and its fellows are the works of a Coptic hand or imitations of Coptic models.⁷

Lastly, our criterion of iconography brings the final proof of the origin of one of the most important of our Early Christian manuscripts, the famous Cotton Bible of the British Museum. Lethaby has been industriously assembling the evidence on this point, and from various indications, notably the appearance of a good picture of the Pyramids in one of its miniatures, has finally concluded that the manuscript was probably executed in Egypt.⁸ This is confirmed by the charming vignette of the Third Day of Creation, in which the Days are presented as winged maidens, and the Lord who calls the plants into being is given, as always in pictures of Creation, the aspect of Christ (Fig. 8). The Saviour appears here in the Egyptian type, with short hair depicted in wig-like curls, and in his hand the Coptic sceptre-cross.

Our experiment in iconography thus shows, I think, the importance of this branch of Early Christian archaeology in the attribution of the vagrant works of the minor arts, and the importance also of such an instrument as the Princeton Index, which will give to the study of iconography the encyclopaedic character necessary to make its conclusions final. For to draw conclusions on the basis of iconography, it is not enough as in the natural sciences to assemble the majority, or a good part of one's instances; we must have them *all*. Such totality of material will be afforded eventually, and after years of accumulation, by the Index of Christian Art.

7. The miniature in question is reproduced in *Byz. Denkmäler*, I. pl. II.

8. *Arch. Journal*, 1913, p. 162.



FIG. 6—ROME, VATICAN, MUSEO CRISTIANO: THE RAISING OF LAZARUS, FROM AN IVORY PYXIS



FIG. 7—BERLIN, ANTIQUARIUM: GOLD MEDALLION FROM EGYPT



FIG. 8—LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM: THE THIRD DAY OF CREATION, FROM THE COTTON BIBLE

**LIST OF MONUMENTS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ART CONTAINING
A REPRESENTATION OF CHRIST BEARING OR
HOLDING A CROSS**

SARCOPHAGI:

1. Apt, cathedral, Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte crist.* V, pl. 330, 2.
2. Arles, museum, Garr. V, pl. 330, 1.
3. Arles, museum, LeBlant, *Étude sur les sarcophages de la ville d'Arles*, p. 53.
4. Avignon, museum, Garr. V, pl. 331, 1.
5. Milan, Museo archeologico, no. 453, unpublished.
6. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Ms. Peiresc (drawing), LeBlant, *Ét. sarc. d'Arles*, p. 68, pl. 68.
7. Rome, Vatican, Garr. V, pl. 325, 1.
8. Rome, from Vatican cemetery, Garr. V, pl. 331, 2.

MOSAICS:

9. Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum, from S. Michele in Affricisco, Ravenna, Garr. IV, pl. 267, 2.
10. Ravenna, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Garr. IV, pl. 233, 2.
11. Ravenna, Palazzo archivescovile, Garr. IV, pl. 222, 3.
12. Ravenna, S. Apollinare Nuovo, Garr. IV, pl. 243, 3.
13. Rome, S. Lorenzo *f. l. m.*, Garr. IV, pl. 271.
14. Rome, S. Teodoro, Garr. IV, pl. 252, 3.

IVORIES (the scenes in which the *Christus crucifer* occurs are indicated in parentheses):

15. Bonn, from Bavaria, Garr. VI, pl. 439, 2 (Raising of Lazarus).
16. Cambridge, England, MacLean Coll., Garr. VI, pl. 452, 1 (Healing of Paralytic, Samaritan Woman).
17. Etschmiadzin, Strzygowski, *Byz. Denkmäler*, I, pl. I (Miracles, Entry into Jerusalem).
18. Florence, Bargello, from Luxemburg, Garr. VI, pl. 437, 5 (Epiphany).
19. Keele Hall, England, Sneyd Coll., Garr. VI, pl. 439, 4 (Demoniac).
20. Lavoute-Chilhac, Haute-Loire, Rohault de Fleury, *La Messe*, pl. 366.
21. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Garr. VI. 458, 2 (Virgin seated holding Child who carries Cross, Entry into Jerusalem, Miracles, *Cf.* Fig. 5 of the present article).
22. Paris, Michel Coll., Garr. VI, pl. 448, 10-13 (Miracles).
23. Paris, Musée Cluny, Garr. VI, pl. 438, 4 (Raising of Lazarus).
24. Paris, Louvre, Strzygowski, *Hellenistische und Koptische Kunst*, p. 28 (Bust of Christ holding Cross).
25. Paris(?), from St. Maclou, Bar-sur-Aube, Garr. VI., pl. 439, 3 (Healing of Blind Man).
26. Pesaro, cathedral, Garr. VI, pl. 439, 1 (Miracles).
27. Ravenna, museum, from Murano, Garr. VI, pl. 456.
28. Ravenna, Cathedra of Maximianus, Garr. VI, pls. 414, 418, 419 (Bust of Christ, Samaritan Woman, Entry into Jerusalem, *Cf.* Fig. 3 of the present article, Miracles).
29. Rome, Vatican, from Milan, Garr. VI, pl. 438, 3 (Miracles, *Cf.* Fig. 6 of the present article).
30. Vienna, Figdor Coll., *Roemische Quartalschrift*, 1898, p. 37, fig. 6.

LAMPS (The names of places are given as of provenance):

31. Africa, De Rossi, *Bull. arch. crist.* 1890, p. 14.
- 32-34. Africa, LaBlanchère & Gauckler, *Cat. Musée d'Alaoui*, nos. 499-501.
35. Athens(?), Garr. VI, p. 109.
36. Athens(?), De Rossi, *Bull. arch. crist.* 1890, p. 14.
37. Bagai, Africa, A Héron de Villefosse, *Le Musée archéologique*, 1871, I, pp. 113-117.
38. Bergamo, Forrer, *Frühchristl. Altertüemer aus Achmim-Panopolis*, pl. IV, 2, (Cf. Fig. 1 of the present article).
39. Carthage, *Rev. de l'art chrét.* 1893, p. 37, no. 903.
40. Carthage, *Musées de l'Algérie*, III, pl. VIII, 1.
41. Carthage, *Rev. Arch.* 1889 (XIII), pl. VIII, 33.
42. Numidia, De Rossi, *Bull. arch. crist.* 1890, p. 13.
43. Posilipo, De Rossi, *Bull. arch. crist.* 1874, p. 130.
44. Rome, from Palatine, De Rossi, *Bull. arch. crist.* 1867, p. 12.
45. Rome, Brüls Coll. Garr. VI, pl. 473, 4.

MISCELLANEOUS:

46. Achmim, textile, Forrer, *Frühchristl. Altertüemer aus Achmim-Panopolis*, pl. XVIII, 1. (The figure here may represent St. George or St. Michael).
47. Berlin, Antiquarium, bronze medallion, Fig. 7.
48. Cairo, museum, cover of earthenware vessel, Strzygowski, *Koptische Kunst*, no. 7142, p. 248.
49. Etschmiadzin, manuscript miniature, Strzygowski, *Byz. Denkmäler* I, pl. II, 2.
50. London, British museum, miniature of the Cotton Bible, Fig. 8.
51. Orléans, Terracotta vase, Garr. VI, pl. 466, 2.
52. Ravenna, Orthodox Baptistery, stucco relief, Smith, *Early Christian Iconography*, p. 153.
53. Rome, Vatican, Museo cristiano, bronze medallion, Garr. VI, pl. 480, 5.
54. Rome, Vatican Library, gold-glass, Garr. III, pl. 189, 1 (fragment).
55. Syracuse, vase-fragment, Garr. VI, pl. 466, 1.